694.c.2.
6

A SERMON

PREACHED

AT THE ORDINATION HELD

AT CH. CH. Nov. 21. 1779.

BUTLER
BY JOHN LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD.

PUBLISHED AT HIS LORDSHIP'S REQUEST.

BY JOHN RANDOLPH, M. A.

STUDENT OF CH. CH.

OXFORD.

PRINTED FOR J. AND J. FLETCHER IN THE TURLE;
AND MESS. RIVINGTON ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,
LONDON. MDCCLXXIX.

Imprimatur,

GEO. HORNE,

Dec. 8. 1779. Vice-Can. OXON.

1 Cor. xii. 31.

Covet earneſtly the beſt gifts.

IT may well be enquir'd, ſince it is nowhere particularly laid down in Scripture, what are thoſe beſt gifts or qualifications requiſite to form the character of a Miniſter of Chriſt's goſpel. The rule and ſtandard is indeed given us, but here alſo as in many other inſtances we are left to *work out our own ſalvation*. I am ſenſible that I take the words of my text in a limited ſenſe, but it is one of thoſe which they will bear amongſt others. St. Paul ſpeaks principally of the miraculous gifts which were beſtow'd on many in the firſt age of the Church, but our acquir'd talents are the ſame in many reſpects, liable as well as they to abuſe, but of ſignal uſe and ſervice if properly underſtood and applied; and they have this alſo in common, that they are of little worth unleſs made ſubſervient and aſſiſtant to true Chriſtian charity.

Now at the firſt propagation of the goſpel, the immediate and extraordinary aſſiſtance of the holy ſpirit of God, ſupplied every thing which was wanting; the ignorant and illiterate were choſen "[a] *to confound the wiſdom of* "*this world*:" But it is matter of fact and experience that this ſpecial inſpiration has long ſince ceas'd, and it is very preſumptuous to act as if we were poſſeſs'd of ſuch inſpiration or had a claim to it. On the other hand, it cannot be ſaid that the office of the Miniſter ſtands not in need of great aſſiſtance and conſiderable attainments. It is true indeed that the "[b] *goſpel is preach'd unto the* "*poor*;" that in matters of common faith and common practice the religion of Chriſt furniſhes to every man a plain and eaſy rule: But the caſe is different with thoſe who are to explain and defend its truths, to convince the gainſayers, or repel their attacks, and to uphold and ſtate in its true light that wonderful ſeries of evidence on which our holy religion depends. This is no eaſy work. The Scripture certainly has its difficulties, perhaps many more than any one book or any branch of

[a] 1 Cor. i. 27. [b] Math. xi. 5.

Learning

Learning whatever: It has exercis'd the labours of men for ages, and for ought that appears will ſtill continue to furniſh ample room for enquiry. And this alſo is matter of experience. The queſtion is what are thoſe talents and attainments which may enable us to enter with ability upon ſo laborious and important an undertaking. I meddle not here with ſacred learning; every thing that deſerves that denomination, how remote ſoever its connection may be with the truths of chriſtianity, is of high importance; but I would rather ſpeak at preſent of profane learning as ſubordinate and introductory to that which is ſacred.

It may perhaps be urg'd that it is better at once after a few preparatory ſteps to devote ourſelves entirely to the ſervice and ſtudy of religion, but this is an opinion I fear more ſpecious than true. A branch of learning of ſuch vaſt extent requires more than common preparation, and a mind properly ſtrengthen'd and improv'd. Beſides that the Scriptures contain certain truths of ſo difficult and abſtruſe a nature as are apt to perplex unſteady minds. Even in the Apoſ-

tolic age there were "[c] *unlearned and unſtable* "*men who wreſted the Scriptures to their own* "*deſtruction*;" and preſent experience is a ſad confirmation of the truth of this remark. The mind again that has been taught to think in one track only, and has been confin'd to one branch of learning, how excellent and copious ſoever, is apt to become narrow and contracted. Nor is ſacred learning exempt from this common lot. It is then only that the mind expands itſelf, and begins to enlarge its views, when it can take in many things at once, can aſſign to each of them their due rank, and obſerve them in compariſon with each other. Accordingly I obſerve, that the Church of England has ever wiſh'd to connect the cauſe of Religion with that of Learning; has wiſely indeed left in many inſtances the degree and kind of it to diſcretion; for all have not the ſame opportunities and talents: A ſlender knowledge of the original languages, a plain underſtanding, and an honeſt heart, may without doubt do eſſential ſervice to the cauſe of Chriſtianity: But let thoſe who have other talents and opportunities, conſider whether it

[c] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

be

be not a very criminal neglect, to throw away what Providence has plac'd in their hands for good purpoſes; and whether a proportionate account may not be requir'd of them. If, as has been ſuggeſted, the religion of Chriſt be meant as a trial of our underſtanding [d], and for that reaſon has been offer'd to us rather as matter of enquiry, than obtruded upon us with ſuch a force of evidence, as ſhould extort conviction and aſſent, this becomes a ſtill more ſerious conſideration. The Church of England then, whatever indulgence may have been allow'd in ſome inſtances, has wiſely determined as far as may be to call in the whole compaſs of human learning to her aid.

But the truth of the argument, which I mean to enforce, will be beſt ſeen from a plain enumeration of particulars.

And firſt the very languages of the ſacred Scriptures include within them a variety of other information: the one difficult and obſcure from its high antiquity: the other from its vaſt copiouſneſs, and the variations which

[d] Grotius de Veritate Rel. Chr. Butler's Analogy.

it has undergone: The one indeed can ſcarcely be ſtudied in any other book, except as far as it is connected with the other Eaſtern languages: But the Greek is not well ſtudied in any ſingle book; no competent knowledge of it can be acquir'd, but by obſerving it in its ſeveral ſtates, and in the hands of different authors. Thus we muſt look for authority for the ſenſes we give to its words, and for a knowledge of the genius and ſpirit of the language. Beſides that no one language can be well underſtood by itſelf; by comparing it with others we ſhall beſt learn its diſtinctions, and thoſe properties which it has in common with others; and cannot well paſs by the enquiry concerning the univerſal principles of all language. Then the number of Verſions which are to be conſulted as interpretations, imply alſo a conſiderable ſkill in their ſeveral languages.

Now to this knowledge of languages another conſiderable branch is nearly related, or rather ariſes out of it. I mean the ſcience of Criticiſm, which Literary men allow to be the ſupport and foundation of all learning whatever; whether it be that Criticiſm which decides between a number of various readings,

and

and clears the text from its corruptions; or that higher ſort which lays down with accuracy and preciſion the exact ſenſe of words and ſentences, their origin and derivation; and unfolds the ſeveral parts of a perplex'd argument ſo as to ſhew their relation to each other: And this is a work of no moderate ſkill: The whole art of Criticiſm is a weapon which cannot be wielded by a feeble hand; it requires a very nice circumſpection, and a great habitual readineſs and dexterity; all which can be acquir'd no otherwiſe than by much thought and reflection, and by conſidering the principles of this art under ſeveral different views, not as exemplified in a ſingle book. The uſe of it is obvious: we ſhall have a plain road to the doctrines of Chriſtianity, when we are maſters of the exact ſenſe of the ſacred writings. And that the Scriptures have ſuffer'd the ſame corruptions, and abound with the ſame difficulties as other books of ancient Learning, is no matter of argument but of fact.

Again, a great part of the Scriptures is Hiſtorical, and neceſſarily connected with other parts of profane Hiſtory; the very time and manner of the propagation of our holy Religion,

Religion, cannot well be underſtood without the Hiſtory of the times: And I would obſerve here again, that the nature and properties of Hiſtory are not well collected from any one Author, but from many. If then Hiſtory be neceſſary and uſeful, the inferior ſciences of Geography and Chronology, which adminiſter to Hiſtory, are at the ſame time included; and that other ſpecies of Hiſtory alſo which treats not of paſt tranſactions, but of the preſent manners and cuſtoms of a diſtant people; a part of Learning which has in many inſtances been happily applied to the explanation of the Scriptures.

Another part of the Scriptures is argumentative, and its arguments are conducted in the ſame manner for the moſt part, and by the ſame laws as in ordinary caſes; and the teſtimony and evidence on which our faith is grounded, is different if in degree yet not in ſpecies from teſtimony and evidence in general; ſo that it will be expedient to underſtand the nature and force of the ſeveral kinds of reaſoning and of evidence, and the principles and laws on which they depend. It will be very expedient to ſtrengthen the powers of our underſtanding by a ſcientifical knowledge

knowledge of its operations. Here again the perverſeneſs of mankind is daily at work: The Chriſtian faith has been attack'd, and will probably continue to be attack'd, by every ſpecies of fallacy and ſophiſtry. It is neceſſary therefore to ſtrip this ſophiſtry of its falſe dreſs, and to be able to reduce it to that ſtandard by which error and truth are diſtinguiſh'd. And if this be the caſe, then alſo all thoſe ſciences which tend to give us habits of cloſe reaſoning, and of attention, by ſetting before us the beſt examples of it, and by leading the mind through a long train of ſtrict argument to the diſcovery of great truths, become collaterally uſeful.

Beſides that the Philoſophical Sciences have ſomething in themſelves, which may be uſeful in the cauſe of Religion: All ſuch ſpeculations lead the mind ultimately to the conſideration of the works and providence of God; and thoſe of natural Philoſophy in particular cannot but tend to the forming a ſerious and devout turn of mind: The exclamation of the Pſalmiſt cannot but ſuggeſt itſelf in the courſe of ſuch enquiries; "*O* "*Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wiſdom* "*haſt thou made them all.*"

 It will

It will be thought perhaps, that the Science of Moral Philoſophy is now totally ſuperſeded, ſince the Chriſtian Religion exhibits to us ſo much more perfect a ſyſtem of morality; but I would fain know on what authority we aſſert this ſuperiority without ſome knowledge of either ſyſtem. Nor are Ethics properly underſtood confin'd to this ſenſe; their firſt and beſt object is to explain the paſſions, diſpoſitions, and habits, which diſcover themſelves in human actions, and influence thoſe actions; and this part of Ethics is by no means ſuperſeded. It is ſurely neceſſary for thoſe who are to teach and exhort mankind, and who are ſo to demean themſelves in the world as to recommend by their conduct, example, and doctrine, the Religion they profeſs, to bear with them, as far as may be, a knowledge of Mankind properly ſo call'd. Again, in this and in other branches of Philoſophy, it will be uſeful to obſerve, how far unaſſiſted reaſon has been able to advance; how far, and in what reſpect, the opinions of men in former ages have approach'd to the truth, or have deviated from it: We ſhall have no cauſe for preſumption, and arrogance; but ſhall rather

ther learn to receive with a thankful and reverential awe the gracious revelations of our God.

But theſe enquiries have become the more neceſſary, ſince it has been the practice of modern Deiſm and Infidelity to revive, and that with leſs acuteneſs and argument, the moſt trifling objections of ancient Scepticiſm; excuſable perhaps in that age, unenlighten'd with reveal'd Religion: at preſent they maintain their ground through the perverſeneſs and ignorance of Mankind; and yet theſe pitiful dregs of the Sophiſtry of old long ſince refuted, are call'd, by a ſtrange abuſe of the term, Philoſophy. It may be uſeful perhaps on ſome occaſions, to attack theſe aſſailants on their own ground, and to follow them into that darkneſs, in which they would willingly hide themſelves. Perhaps it may be objected, that it is dangerous to encourage too free a ſpirit of enquiry: I cannot underſtand how the reſearch after truth ſhould lead to error, provided it be conducted with diſcretion. It is dangerous indeed for weak and unprepar'd minds to involve themſelves at once in abſtruſe and difficult queſtions; but

but I am ſuppoſing us to proceed with proper caution, and in the right track.

But ſtill farther, even the elegant arts ſhould not be neglected. What if they are held to be merely ornamental? there can be no reaſon why Religion ſhould not have every honeſt advantage; there can be no reaſon why that which is held to be comelineſs and grace ſhould not accompany it, provided its native purity and ſimplicity be ſtill preſerv'd; and that it may be preſerv'd is plain, ſince true elegance cannot ſubſiſt without ſimplicity. But I think not ſo meanly of theſe arts; they are more connected with truth than we may be at firſt aware, and tend to give the mind a quick ſenſe of right and wrong; conſequently to improve it, and prepare it for the reception of that which is pure and holy: and I would obſerve, that the true religion has never diſclaim'd ſuch aſſiſtance.

To conclude; a mind thus ſtor'd and prepar'd would certainly come with great advantage and ability to religious ſtudies; beſides the mere technical knowledge thus acquir'd, by frequent exerciſe, and by having taken ſuch a compaſs, it would be much enlarg'd and ſtrengthen'd.

Nor

Nor is experience wanting to confirm this notion. Superſtition, Enthuſiaſm, and Infidelity have always had their foundation in ignorance. The ſuperſtitions of the Roman Catholic Religion aroſe and took root in times when good literature was loſt to the world. The modern Enthuſiaſts are uſually thoſe who have come to the ſtudy of ſacred Learning with minds ill prepar'd for its reception, and have built their errors upon miſinterpretation, or upon that common miſtake of arguing from detach'd paſſages ſeparated from the context. It is the ſame with modern Infidelity, however it may plume itſelf on its ſuperior talents; ſtill it has its foundation in groſs ignorance, and often in an ignorance of plain elementary principles: there may perhaps be ſomething plauſible at firſt ſight; there may be a ſuperficial glare ſufficient to engage and perplex weak minds; but I am perſuaded, if we had had more ſound learning amongſt us, the moſt popular of theſe compilations, whether they paſs under the name of Philoſophy or of Hiſtory, would never have riſen to eminence. It may be ſaid that ſome of them are the work of ingenuity, and of bright

parts; perhaps ſo, though this is to attribute to them more than moſt of them deſerve; ſtill they are founded in ignorance, while men vainly preſume to ſcan what is beyond their reach, and aſpire at once to thoſe things which are not to be attain'd but by degrees and by cautious ſteps. There is one ſure way of ſtriking at the root of this evil, and that not ſo much by deſultory attacks, as by ſpreading wide the influence of better principles and of ſounder knowledge.

Thus, I think, from the inſtitutions of our church, from the hiſtory and experience of paſt and preſent times, and from the nature of the thing itſelf, we may eaſily diſcern a ſtrong connection between the cauſe of learning in all its ſeveral branches and that of Religion; and I would be underſtood at preſent to ſpeak of human Learning not as valuable in itſelf, b[illegible] as ſubſervient and ſubſidiary to ſometh[illegible]g of higher importance; as preparing the way and opening the mind for the reception of greater truths; as tending to form that great character which ſhall embrace all theſe parts of Learning as ſecondary and ſubordinate to that which is its principal ſtudy, and ſhall then apply the whole with united force

force to the promoting the knowledge of the Chriſtian Faith and the exerciſe of Chriſtian Charity: "*Caſting down imaginations, and every* "*high thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the know-* "*ledge of God, and bringing into captivity every* "*thought to the obedience of Chriſt*[a]." Γυμνάσιον τῆς ψυχῆς ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία, τέλος δ' ἡ Θεία[b].

It may be urg'd that all this is within the reach of few; be it ſo; perhaps of none; but by holding forth that which is perfect as a model we ſhall be able to approach nearer to it. Some portion at leaſt is in every man's power. And it is an undeniable conſequence, that if theſe gifts may be applied to ſo good purpoſes, they call for our moſt earneſt endeavours; and on the other hand we may be aſſur'd, that if our endeavours are earneſt and ſincere, the gracious aſſiſtance of God will not be wanting in this and all our other labours. Then may we apply to ourſelves with confidence thoſe moſt comfortable words of our Saviour Chriſt to his Apoſtles and through them to his Church. "*And Lo,* "*I am with you alway, even unto the end of the* "*world*[c]."

[a] 2 Cor. x. 5. [b] Origenes. [c] Math. xxviii. 20.